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ABSTRACT

The identification techniques in Herbert C. Kelman's schema of identification were used to analyze the near, and perhaps surprising, success of Rep. Frances (Sissy) Farenthold's bid for the Democratic Texas gubernatorial nomination in 1972. Opposing government corruption, Farenthold overcame the potential obstacles of being a politically liberal and a woman and won the vote of a diverse section of the Texas electorate. She conducted a grass roots campaign in which her main tool was the rhetoric of identification. She presented herself as one who fought corruption and who would identify with a new coalition of voters to represent a public government rather than a private government. Five strategies were used by Farenthold in her campaign speaking: identify a specific group of people; identify an enemy which causes that group's problems; show the moral inferiority of the enemy; infuse into the group a sense of urgency for change; and infuse into the group a sense of power. (MKM)

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Identification Strategies of a Texas Rebel: Frances (Sissy) Farenthold

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As early as April 1971 some Texans were talking about Frances (Sissy) Farenthold. The Texas Observer stated:

> Courage is not a commodity much in evidence at the Texas State Legislature, it not being an institution that gives many opportunities for display of same. . . . But one can find there instances of moral courage. Sometimes it takes courage to compromise, to accept too little, too late, because it means the poor will get--not enough, but an eighth of a loaf. There is the kind of courage it takes to resist temptation--there are lots of temptations around the capitol. And there is the courage of just keeping on . . . . Frances Farenthold has that kind of courage.[1]

Representative Farenthold demonstrated another kind of courage during the spring of 1972. Within a relatively short time (five months), Sissy conducted the most successful gubernatorial Democratic primary campaign ever undertaken by a liberal woman in Texas. (Ma Ferguson was Texas' first and only woman governor. Elected in 1924 after her husband had been impeached, she was not elected on her own merit.) Sissy emerged from the primary with 28% of the vote which was enough to force Dolph Briscoe, a conservative and one of the largest landholders in Texas, into a run-off. Her greatest victory was that she helped oust incumbents Preston Smith and Lt. Governor Ben Barnes from contention. Ben Barnes, a Lyndon Johnson and John Connally protegé, was considered by many powerful Democrats to have a bright national political future. "Paul Wieck of The New Republic asked Farenthold the night of the downfall, 'How does it feel to have defeated a future president of the United States?' She just smiled and everyone knew that the victory was sweet.[2]

The victory was not only sweet, it was also surprising. How did a candidate who ignored professional campaign managers and tactics win such a victory? From a professional viewpoint, the Farenthold campaign was inferior technically and financially. The sparse television campaign was technically poor, and Sissy did not use a professional public relations man. She refused to use billboards because she doesn't believe in them. And her organization was in constant chaos. Financially the odds were against her. "Briscoe reported that he had spent $919,422; Barnes reported that he had spent $675,966; Farenthold spent $211,921. It averaged out to about $1 a vote for Briscoe, $1.70 a vote for Barnes, and 33 cents a vote for Farenthold."[3] How did she win? This author contends that she was victorious because she responded accurately to the rhetorical situation by conducting a grass roots campaign in which her main tool was rhetoric of identification. This paper will analyze those identification techniques according to Herbert C. Kelman's schema of identification and suggest those themes which might be common to similar attempts at identification.

Lloyd Bitzer defines rhetorical situation as "a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence. . . . Any exigence is an imperfection marked by urgency."[4] There are three constituents of any rhetorical situation: exigence, audience, and constraints. The exigence which created a need for Farenthold's discourse was corruption in Texas government. It was manifested in the form of the Sharpstown stock-fraud scandal in which prominent Texas politicians were accused of trying "to avoid federal regulation by getting the special session of the Texas Legislature in the summer of 1969, to pass a law allowing state banks to be insured by state chartered insurance companies."[5] Some of the officials who made a fast profit were: "Governor Preston Smith, Texas Democratic Chairman Dr. Elmer Baum, who was a member of the State Banking Board, and Speaker of the House Gus Mutscher."[6] Lt. Governor Ben Barnes was never tied to the scandal except by association. But the stock scandal proved to be his undoing. "What brought Sissy Farenthold to prominence was that the Sharpstown scandal was blatant enough to offend the voters but not the Legislature."[7] Mrs. Farenthold introduced a resolution into the House calling for an

independent investigation of the scandal. Her resolution received support from only 30 of 150 members. This group became known in Austin as the Dirty Thirty. More importantly, Sissy Farenthold began to be labeled as a reformer and a rebel. Until Sissy's decision to run for the gubernatorial nomination, the Democratic primary appeared to be another election of the elite. Candidates were Preston Smith, Ben Barnes who was the favorite, and Dolph Briscoe, a millionaire banker and rancher from Uvalde who had no connection with the Sharpstown affair. Sissy's decision to run for the nomination was clearly a response to the exigence of a politics-as-usual, corruption-as-usual situation in Texas.

The second constituent of the rhetorical situation was the Texas electorate. "A rhetorical audience consists of only those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change."[8] In this particular situation, the audience was the Texas electorate. The voters possessed the power of reform if they would exercise it. Voters in a Texas primary can cross over party lines. Hence, Sissy's audience was a heterogenous group of people with diverse backgrounds, attitudes, and values. Many persons doubted that a liberal graduate of Vassar could ever unify enough persons to achieve victory. Such doubts were justified in view of the set of constraints within the rhetorical situation. "Standard sources of constraint include beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives, and the like. . . ."[9] The most significant constraints upon Mrs. Farenthold were: (1) she was a woman; (2) she was politically liberal; (3) she was opposing the most powerful financial interests in Texas. Mrs. Farenthold assessed the situation and responded with unique rhetorical discourse that helped modify the exigence of political corruption. Her campaign was one of identification. She became identified as someone "who fought the corruption in Austin rather than tolerated it--the Den Mother of the Dirty Thirty."[10] Her rhetoric was aimed at creating a new coalition of voters in Texas. Hence, the theme of her campaign became public government versus private government.

"Identification can be said to occur when an individual adopts behavior derived from another person or a group because this behavior is associated with satisfying self-defining relationship to this person or group."[11] A self-defining relationship is a "role relationship that forms a part of the person's self-image."[12] Identification may take the form of a "reciprocal role relationship--that is, of a relationship to a group in which his self-definition is anchored."[14] A distinct set of antecedents must be working in order that the process of identification may work. They are: (1) respondents must be concerned with the social anchorage of their behavior; (2) the influencing agent's power must be based on his attractiveness which is the "possession of qualities on the part of the agent that make a continued relationship to him particularly desirable;" and (3) the role requirements must be salient and the expectations deriving from it must be dominant.[15]

The rhetorical situation fulfilled the first antecedent condition. The Texas voters were concerned with the blatant corruption of their leaders. Voters had never before seemed "shocked at hearing about the impersonal forces that actually control a state government."[16] For example, Texas has 117 utility lobbyists without statewide regulation of utility rates and an insurance commission composed of insurance agents. But Texans did respond to a situation which made the social anchorage of behavior salient. Even Texans could not condone such a flagrant violation of the public trust as the stock-fraud scandal.

Sissy Farenthold assumed the role of the reformer by her action in the Legislature. The Den Mother of the Dirty Thirty became an attractive source of power. While stressing her role as reformer and underplaying her role as a woman, Sissy forged a coalition of supporters from a diverse electorate. Her rallying cry was public government versus private government. Portions of her announcement speech illustrate this strategy:

> I am a candidate in order to give the people of Texas a choice--other than between two contaminated candidates and a legislator from from the fifties. . . . I am not part of the entrenched Texas political system, a system that spawned this present era of corruption and stock fraud scandal. . . . When the stench of corruption and greed and self-serving profit-taking no longer prevails in Austin, then the problems of the people can be met. . . . And I ask the people of Texas to help me accomplish this pledge.[17]

Relying on her identity as a reformer, Sissy concentrated on "achieving prepotency of the induced response" which fulfills Kelman's third antecedent condition. In other words, Sissy tried to make the solution of voting for reform important to the public. "To the extent that the induced response becomes prepotent because the requirements of a role are delineated, influence will tend to take the form of identification."[18] Sissy attempted to make the role requirements salient by calling for "honest government" in a "new Texas."

Mrs. Farenthold utilized five identification strategies in her campaign speaking: (1) Identify an explicit group of people; (2) Identify an enemy which causes that group's problems; (3) Show moral inferiority of the enemy; (4) Infuse a sense of urgency for change into the group; (5) Infuse a sense of power into the group.

Sissy attempted to create her new coalition of voters by stressing common goals of the group such as honest government and government by the people. Hardly any Texan could deprecate such ideals. She attempted to make the group cohesive by pointing out the common enemy: "special interests in Austin and the private government that has ruled Texas." She blasted all special interest groups in Austin--University of Texas Regents, lobbyists, railroad commission, and insurance commission -- which were connected to the private government of Smith and Barnes. She attacked the villains on the basis of their moral inferiority. A statement released on March 15, 1972, exemplifies this strategy: "The unsavory smell of corruption hangs like a rancid blanket over Texas. . . . Our state government is leaderless... the people's needs are not met. . . . Neither the Governor nor the Lt. Governor can be trusted. . . . They are both men with records that are not in keeping with the high standards required of true public servants."[19] Her campaign speaking was filled with this juxtaposition of the high standards of the new coalition of voters with the moral inferiority of the villains.

Sissy openly supported a platform calling for corporate profits tax, reduction of marijuana penalties, disarming of the Texas Rangers, and gun control legislation. Despite such a liberal platform in traditionally conservative Texas, she united voters under the banner of political reform. In Galveston, she said, "I come before you with one promise: to clean up this state and make it livable for rich and poor alike." The common enemy was more salient to the electorate than her liberal platform (especially since the Texas Governor has relatively little power) or the fact that she was a woman. She articulated this point when she stated, "I have never assumed that I had the automatic vote of any group. I plan to seek the support of all those who are interested in ending corruption in government. . . ."[20]

Mrs. Farenthold identified the urgency of the need for change by discussing issues which were important to the public. She blasted Barnes for rising food costs and a proposed groceries tax. Speaking in Nueces County Sissy said, "We've heard promises from the Lt. Governor but his leadership would have given a sales tax on groceries in 1969 and an increase in gasoline tax in 1971."[21] Another issue was high insurance rates. In Midland Mrs. Farenthold said, "Texans have been paying outrageous insurance rates for years. . . . The state insurance board sets the rates that we all have to pay, but the members of that commission are insurance salesmen or friends of the big money interests. . . the state insurance commission should be run by friends of the people, not friends of the insurance industry."[22]

Sissy's final strategy was to infuse a sense of power into the people by stressing the power of the ballot. She relied on this grass roots power to change the leadership of the state. One important tactic was to urge voter registration especially on the part of the newly enfranchised young voters. She urged voter registration to Mexican-Americans, Blacks, and women. A typical plea to the people said, "If the people of Texas want to be heard; if the people want to see honest government and turn this state away from corruption; if the people want to change Texas--register to vote before April 5."[23] Sissy spoke of the people in Texas who possessed the power to change the system. At a speech in Galveston she emphasized her faith in the people's power to seek new government by saying, "So it all comes down to political reform--to a people's revolt by an ever-growing band of insurgents who are sick of corruption, sick of hypocrisy, and determined that Texas is going to be a livable place, now and for our children and for our children's children as well."[24] Sissy's support widened as she received endorsements from labor unions, students, women, professors, Blacks, and Mexican-Americans. It appeared that the people believed in their power. On May 3, three days before the election, Farenthold predicted a "People's government in Austin next year. . . . The people of Texas are on the march and we'll prove on May 6 that we can create our own political realities."[25]

Why then did Mrs. Farenthold win a victory that sent her to the run-off election in June? She won because she responded to the rhetorical situation with identification strategies that created a new coalition of voters in Texas. The voters united behind Sissy to rid Texas government of special interest groups. They responded to her call for a return to government by the people. Her strategies of creating a common bond for a group, identifying an enemy of the group, showing moral inferiority of the enemy, stressing the exigence of the situation, and infusing the power of change into the group's identity are ones which might be utilized in similar rhetorical situations. Two days before the election Sissy summarized her rhetorical strategies when she said, "The people are on the move, the movement is now, to reclaim the state from those who have brought disrespect to our government and disgust, to its citizens. . . . My campaign has united people from all areas and all walks of life. This entire state must unite to put Texas government in the hands of the people for a change."[26] The new coalition did unite. Barnes was defeated in his bid to reach the run-off election with Briscoe. In his place was a Texas rebel, Frances Farenthold.

Footnotes

[1]"A Melancholy Rebel," The Texas Observer, LXII (April 9, 1971), 3.

[2]"And All Without Billboards," The Texas Observer, LXIV (May 26, 1972), 3.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," Contemporary Rhetoric, Douglas Ehninger, ed., (London: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1972), 43.

[5]Tony M. Allison, "Governor Preston Smith and the Sharpstown Stock Scandal--An Analysis of a Changing Image," (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Southwest State University, 1972), 25.

[6]Ibid., 26.

[7]"U.S. Journal: Texas--Reformer," New Yorker, (June 17, 1972), 79.

[8]Bitzer, Contemporary Rhetoric, 44.

[9]Ibid.

[10]New Yorker, (June 17, 1972), 81.

[11]Herbert C. Kelman, "Processes of Opinion Change," The Process of Social Influence, Thomas D. Beisecker, and Donn W. Parson, eds., (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), 36.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Ibid., 37-38.

[15]Ibid., 40-41.

[16]New Yorker, (June 17, 1972), 79.

[17]"State Representative Frances Farenthold Announces for Governor," Press release from Farenthold headquarters, Austin, (1972).

[18]Kelman, The Process of Social Influence, 41.

[19]Press release from Farenthold headquarters, Austin (March 15, 1972).

[20]"Labor Council Unanimously Endorses Farenthold," Press release from Farenthold headquarters, Austin, (February 15, 1972).

[21]"Farenthold Hits Rising Food Costs," Press release from Farenthold headquarters, Austin, (April 19, 1972).

[22]"Farenthold Hits High Insurance Rates," Press release from Farenthold headquarters, Austin, (April 28, 1972).

[23]Press release from Farenthold headquarters, (March 23, 1972).

[24]Press release, Galveston, (March 3, 1972).

[25]Press release, Corpus Christi, (May 3, 1972).

[26]Press release, Prairie View, (May 4, 1972).

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"And All Without Billboards," The Texas Observer, LXIV (May 26, 1972), 3-4.